

## Local Peach Grower Keeps Family Tradition Alive

By ADAM SWIFT

Drive down Bay Road at the right time on a summer afternoon and you might find Myrna Henry and Michelle Lapointe selling boxes of peaches they picked fresh that morning from their orchard at Howland Farm.

For Henry, taking care of the 10-acre property with its 85 peach trees, vegetable and herb gardens, and raspberry bushes isn't a hobby; it's a full-time job and the continuation of a family tradition.

"The farm has been in my family for a long time," she said. Henry's grandfather, Roger Howland, built the house Henry and Lapointe now live in on the farm and he owned much of the surrounding property.

When Henry was a child, she said, her grandfather grew and sold peaches, strawberries, and raspberries and worked his property tirelessly.

Howland planted the original peach trees on the property when Henry was a child, but those trees were replaced years later.

"When my grandfather was in his late 70s, he planted the peach trees that are out here now," Henry said. She said some of the neighbors remember her grandfather as an old man planting the peach trees he would leave for the rest of his family.

Henry came back to the farm a little over five years ago to take care of her mother before she passed away.



Myrna Henry and Michelle Lapointe fill their pickup truck with peaches for sale at the end of their driveway.

Since she has been running the farm, Henry said, she has an even greater appreciation of both the sacrifices her grandfather made and why he made them.

"Now that I'm a little bit older, I understand where my grandfather was coming from and about the importance of the land," Henry said.

With the exception of the harshest winter months, the land demands constant attention, Henry said. And as small farmers, Henry and Lapointe have no choice but to do it all

themselves, from picking the varieties and planting the trees in the spring, to jarring and preserving the peaches that didn't quite make the cut in the fall.

While there are other fruits and vegetables on the farm, it's the peaches getting the lion's share of attention this time of year.

"We have about 85 peach trees of all different varieties, and they all become ripe at different times," Henry said. "All of the varieties have distinct flavors and textures."

But is there ever a time when Henry has had her fair share of peaches?

"No. We were out there picking this morning and we ate some," said Henry. "I'm never sick of them. They are so perfect."

The peaches may be perfect, but the growing conditions are some times less than perfect.

"We've had a little trouble with the humidity lately," Henry said. "Peaches like it hot and dry."



**Tessie keeps watch over one of the more than 80 peach trees at Howland Farm on Bay Road.**

There's also a vast array of wildlife that like to get their paws or claws into the peaches.

"We have squirrels, chipmunks, birds, turkeys, and woodchucks," Henry said. "Woodchucks can climb the peach trees, so we have one very fat and happy woodchuck out there."

Depending upon the variety, peaches can be harvested anywhere from July to early September. Last year, however, some wild turkeys put an early end to the season.

"We weren't able to harvest

the last three trees last year because the turkeys were out there eating the peaches," Henry said.

Taking care of the farm is a full-time job, but it isn't the only one Henry and Lapointe have. For the past four years, they have worked as cooks at the Milepost Tavern.

At the Milepost, they've put their peaches to good use, and in turn, won many new fans of their produce.

"We're doing peach shortcake right now, but we also bring in our raspberries, lettuce, tomatoes, and other vegetables from our garden," said Henry, adding that she is thankful that Milepost owners Bud and Patricia Johnson provide such a great opportunity to get the Howland Farm name out there.

"Every year, around the middle of March, Trish tells us that she wants every peach we grow," Henry said.

In addition to the farm's regular customers who start calling to place their orders as soon as the season begins, many of the Milepost Tavern customers who sample the Howland peaches end up wanting to buy a box to take home with them.

Working on the farm and at the restaurant leaves little time for anything else. Henry and Lapointe joke that the winter is the one time they can catch up on all the movies they've missed.

Still, Henry said, she wouldn't trade the life she has for any other. Not only is she in touch with the same land worked by her family, but she said she is also part of a larger community of small farmers.

"The farming community in Duxbury is really outstanding," Henry said. "People are always willing to chat and give advice."

Perhaps even more important than her fellow farmers are the customers who line up year after year at the end of Howland Farm's Bay Road driveway to pick up their peaches.

"It's great connecting with everyone around town," Henry said. "I think they really appreciate how hard we work."